

GRIZZLY BEAR MORTALITY

NFMA 36CFR 219.12(k)(2) One or more preventable grizzly bear mortalities. (Gallatin Forest Plan, 1987, p. IV-5)

.12 (k) (4b) Expected Precision – High

.12 (k) (4b) Expected Reliability – High

.12 (k) (4c) Reporting time – Annually

The Interagency Grizzly Bear Study Team (IGBST) tracks known, probable, and possible grizzly bear mortalities in the Greater Yellowstone Area. They track mortalities both inside the Recovery Zone (Primary Conservation Area or PCA) and in a 10 mile perimeter around the Recovery Zone (IGBST Annual Report 2005, p. 25). Many times when a sow that has young is killed, the young may also die depending on their age. A “probable” mortality is that instance where evidence strongly suggests a mortality has occurred but no carcass has been recovered. When evidence is circumstantial, with no prospect for additional information, a “possible” mortality is designated.

Table 1. Document grizzly bear mortalities on the Gallatin National Forest, 2004-2006 (IGBST Annual Reports 2004-2006).

| Bear ^a | Sex | Age ^b | Date | Location | Certainty | Cause |
|-------------------|-----|------------------|--------------|---------------|-----------|---|
| Unm | Unk | COY | 7/18-8/10/04 | Wapiti Creek | Probable | Natural mortality, specific cause unknown, 1 of 2 cubs of bear #213 lost between 7/18-8/10, location is approximate, estimated as average location for the interval |
| Mkd | M | Adult | 10/31/04 | Spanish Creek | Known | Human-caused, likely accidental poisoning, bear raided hunting camp tent that was unused for a period of time. Bear was marked, but unable to determine number |
| 225 | M | Adult | 5/15/05 | Fir Ridge | Known | Human caused, road kill |
| Unm | F | Adult | 9/28/05 | Rose Creek | Possible | Human-caused, hunting related, self defense. Bow hunter shot a charging female with pistol. Small amount of blood found. Female accompanied by 1 |

^a Unm = unmarked bear, Mkd = marked. Number indicates bear number.

^b COY = cub-of-the-year

| | | | | | | |
|-----|---|----------|---------|------------------------|-------|---|
| | | | | | | yearling. |
| Unm | M | subadult | 9/29/05 | Lady of the Lake Creek | Known | Human-caused, mistaken identity. Under investigation. |
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Natural mortalities are not always found and reported. The cub in 2004 was a case in which the COY failed to be seen after it was already known that the sow had 2 COY. There is no way a COY can survive without its mother for any amount of time, but a carcass was not found so this was called a probably mortality.

The unmarked female in 2005 that was shot by a bow hunter was likely to have a minor wound since not much blood was found and she was seen leaving the area with her yearling.

Bears are killed in collisions with vehicles on occasion. This location, Fir Ridge, is in an area where bears have been killed in the past.

From 1998-2003, the Gallatin National Forest had 7 known and 1 probable grizzly bear mortalities reported. Several of these had the potential to lose young to mortality after the sow was killed. Three of these 8 known and probable mortalities were categorized as 'natural' mortalities, which would not be preventable. One of the 8 mortalities was for unknown cause. The other 4 mortalities fall into the 'preventable' mortality category. One of these 4 was a food-conditioned or habituated bear. Two of the 4 were killed during the hunting season, and were deemed to be in defense of life or property. One of these was during nocturnal camp depredation and one was a chance encounter and resulted in a human injury. The final mortality was in self defense in 2003.

The mortalities clustered, with 5 of them occurring in 2000, and one mortality in each of 1999, 2002, and 2003. There were 2 years with no reported mortalities (1998 and 2001).

Of the four mortalities that were human caused, three were in 'defense of life and property' situations. One was a management removal of a food conditioned bear in the front country.

The Gallatin National Forest has had 4 preventable grizzly bear mortalities over the 6 year period of 1998-2003. This is within the level set in Monitoring Item #7 in the Forest Plan (FP p. IV-6). There can be some debate as to just how much mortality is preventable. The food-conditioned bear is the case that was definitely preventable if proper food storage is in place on the Forest and adjacent private lands and people are adhering to it. The Food Storage Order is in place on the Gallatin National Forest in the Recovery Zone and is being expanded to the entire Forest in 2007. Also, Gallatin County has food storage ordinances. One way or the other, this bear came to associate human presence with food. Unfortunately, a bear can become food-conditioned anywhere and become a dangerous bear to have in the environment once this occurs.

In the case of grizzly bears killed in 'defense of life and property', some of these situations are unavoidable if bears and humans are using the same area. It is possible that education and behavior of humans can be modified, perhaps by convincing people to purchase and use bear spray, but chance encounters are still going to occur. If a person has a firearm, they may choose to defend themselves with it, resulting in a dead or injured bear. The incident of the bear in camp may have been a preventable situation, and the bear may have been a food-habituated bear. With an increasing bear population, and people recreating and hunting in bear habitat, it is reasonable to expect that some bear mortality will occur. This is not to say that bear mortality is acceptable, it is just that the reality is that it is not all preventable.

Citations

Gallatin National Forest Plan. 1987.

Yellowstone Grizzly Bear Investigations. 2004-xxxx. Annual Report of the Interagency Grizzly Bear Study Team. USGS. Bozeman, MT. Website address
<http://www.nrmssc.usgs.gov/research/igbst-home.htm>